CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE FIVE HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FOURTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 12 July 1990, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. Boqumil Sujka (Poland)

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The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 564th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

On behalf of the Conference and myself, I wish to extend a warm welcome to the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, the Right Honourable William Waldegrave, M.P. The Minister already addressed the Conference on 15 June last year, when he introduced document CD/921, concerning some preliminary results of the United Kingdom programme of trial challenge inspections on chemical weapons. His political career is well known to us, as he has held positions of responsibility in the British Government since 1981. Since his last visit to the Conference, his portfolio at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has substantially increased. In addition to arms control, disarmament and defence affairs, he now has charge of relations between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, East-West relations including the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Middle East and all of Africa. In January this year, he was made a member of the Privy Council. I should like to thank him for being with us again today and for the interest that he shows in our work.

In accordance with its programme of work, the Conference continues today its consideration of agenda item 3, "Prevention of nuclear war, including all related matters". In accordance with rule 30 of its rules of procedure, however, any member wishing to do so may raise any subject relevant to the work of the Conference.

I now give the floor to the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, the Right Honourable William Waldegrave, M.P.

Mr. WALDEGRAVE (United Kingdom): Mr. President, thank you very much indeed for your kind introduction, and it is indeed good to be back with the Conference on Disarmament once more. I am delighted, if I may say so, to be here at the time of your presidency. Poland and the United Kingdom have a long history of close relations and, as my statement will mainly concern the chemical weapons negotiations, it is particularly appropriate to make it under the presidency of an Ambassador who has twice filled with such distinction the post of Chairman of the Ad hoc Committee on Chemical Weapons.

Since my visit to the Conference on Disarmament last year, there have been dramatic changes to the political landscape of Europe. I cannot claim that all of them were the result of the increase in my responsibilities at the Foreign Office, but it has certainly been a most fascinating time to have some small part in these events.

These changes were reflected in the Declaration issued in London last week by the NATO summit meeting. This was widely reported in our press and elsewhere, I think, as marking the end of the cold war. As the Declaration said, "The walls that once confined people and ideas are collapsing ... Europeans are determining their own destiny ... They are choosing freedom ... They are choosing peace".

(Mr. Waldegrave, United Kingdom)

This improved political climate has already given rise to significant progress in arms control. Much progress has been made towards completing a START agreement. An agreement on limiting conventional arms in Europe has been given high priority. Further conventional arms limitations are envisaged.

Negotiations on the reduction of short-range nuclear forces are expected shortly after an agreement on conventional forces is signed. And once those negotiations are under way, NATO will propose the mutual elimination of all nuclear artillery shells from Europe.

So there is an air of optimism in Europe and an expectation of rapid progress in both conventional and nuclear arms control.

The recent United States/Soviet bilateral agreement on chemical weapons is a significant and welcome advance. It should give a new impetus to the multilateral negotiations here in the Conference on Disarmament.

But most would say that, in contrast to the other arms control negotiations I have mentioned, the search for a multilateral global chemical weapons ban has already taken too long.

We have to look back to the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the last multilateral agreement on chemical weapons. That treaty governed use in war only, not production or possession.

Recent years have seen a spread of chemical weapons. More countries now possess these weapons than since 1945.

There was one major conflict in the 1980s (the Gulf War) in which chemical weapons were used on a greater scale than in any conflict since the First World War. The leader of one country recently boasted of his possession of new binary weapons.

Has the genie escaped the bottle? Can we still achieve a global chemical weapons ban? Do enough countries actually want a convention? Or are we engaged here in an elaborate charade, going through the motions without affecting the main issues? A process which produces an ever longer and more complex "rolling text", but which leaves the key problems unsolved?

Talks have been going on in Geneva about a chemical weapons ban since the 1960s. First in the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Conference, then in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, and since 1979 in this body. The negotiations have lasted a quarter of a century. We politicians have the duty to ask: why so long? Why haven't the problems been resolved? Why can't chemical weapons match the success of other arms control negotiations? Are these talks dead on their feet or are they going somewhere?

Those of us around this table must believe there is hope, and that it lies here in the Conference on Disarmament, the only forum for global arms control negotiations. We look to multilateral diplomacy to deliver the goods. The United Kingdom view can be stated simply. Anything less than world-wide agreement on chemical weapons would not address the whole problem. But it is not simply a question of negotiating more productively here. There are practical problems which require detailed investigation by member States.

(Mr. Waldegrave, United Kingdom)

Of course, I am aware of the enormous efforts made in the Conference on Disarmament to resolve the extremely difficult problems presented by chemical weapons. I do not underestimate the commitment and will to succeed of those involved here.

One thing is very clear. We must not take the easy way out: we must not follow the example offered by the Biological Weapons Convention of an agreement without effective verification. If a declaratory agreement could meet our concerns, we could agree on a text today. But that would leave the underlying security concerns about chemical weapons unaffected and unresolved.

So, in approaching these talks, we are seeking reassurance that all parties will abide by the terms of the convention. That reassurance must be clear and reliable.

For this reason in our view verification is the top priority. An effective verification régime is crucial for the convention to work.

And challenge inspection is the key to effective verification. There are two reasons for this. The first is the secrecy and evasion traditionally surrounding chemical weapons. Many possessors of chemical weapons have yet to own up. How many countries represented here believe that the three States which have acknowledged their possession of chemical weapons are the whole story? The second reason is the lack of distinctive signature for chemical-weapons-related facilities and systems. If there was such clarity, then chemical weapons would be as recognizable as, say, a tank or aircraft. We could then recognize, count, measure, weigh and in other ways assess the effectiveness, the military value of chemical weapons. But we cannot do this with confidence.

We need therefore a rigorous, wide-ranging verification mechanism covering undeclared as well as declared facilities as a safety net to provide confidence in treaty compliance by signatories. An unverifiable convention would be worthless.

Challenge inspection is the key to effective verification. Yet there are concerns about the implication for national security. Can challenge inspection be effective without putting at risk unrelated national secrets? I think the answer is in the affirmative.

The United Kingdom approach has been to put the feasibility of challenge inspection to the test. We believe the only way to get a convincing answer is to practice the procedures in as realistic a way as possible.

The detailed two-year programme of six trial inspections at United Kingdom Government-owned facilities covered some of our most sensitive security installations, including nuclear-weapons storage, nuclear-weapons research, development and manufacture, and a sensitive communications centre. We asked ourselves the hard questions. What would be the implications for physical security? Would inspections reveal the presence and location of sensitive non-chemical weapons stores? Would they compromise information on

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(Mr. Waldegrave, United Kingdom)

non-chemical weapon stock-holding, throughput and capacity? Would they give access to classified weapon-design details, especially to nuclear-weapon design information? These are all difficult problems. But we think solutions have been found.

The paper I am tabling today as CD/1012 describes the main lessons from a very extensive work programme. We discovered that: managed access is the key to a balance between the protection of legitimate security interests and the degree of intrusiveness necessary for effective verification; there is no United Kingdom site so sensitive from the national-security viewpoint that we could not allow some form of access within the site, appropriately managed, to an international inspection team under the provisions on challenge inspection of a chemical weapons convention.

In short, the results of our research so far indicate that, as we say in English, "you can have your cake and eat it". But we also recognize that more practical research is needed.

Managed access within the site provides the solution. It is a process of negotiation about how best to demonstrate compliance between inspectors and inspected, which gives the former the access they need and the latter the protection they require. It provides a wide spectrum of techniques. They range from simple shrouding to rigorous methods of protection. Our trials allowed us to develop new techniques. One of these, a system of selective access, is described in some detail in our paper. We found it useful in a number of potentially difficult situations.

On the final form of challenge inspection, we think a challenge inspection régime should be capable of addressing any serious concerns about declared or undeclared facilities: there should be no sanctuary sites, safe from inspection. Challenge inspection should therefore be a regular element of the verification régime; it need not necessarily carry the assumption that the convention is being breached. For this reason, too, we should find a less combative title for this procedure, as others have suggested. "Inspection on request" is the obvious option.

We are conscious that the challenge inspection régime for the chemical weapons convention goes further, and is more all-embracing, than for any other arms control agreements. This is inconvenient, but also unavoidable if chemical weapons verification is to work.

Let me add a word about what challenge inspection is not. It is not a licence to spy. Nor is it a device to uncover commercial secrets. The inspection team have no automatic right to be told what actually goes on in any plant they visit. They may leave at the end of the inspection none the wiser about the nature of the activity or the product of the plant inspected. The inspectors' role is limited to satisfying themselves that, whatever else may be produced or stored on the site, the provisions of the chemical weapons convention are not being violated.

(Mr. Waldegrave, United Kingdom)

As I have said, we do not pretend to have all the answers. More work is needed on some aspects. Civil chemical plants were not included in our programme. Others may have particular concerns not fully addressed in our work.

We have been encouraged by reports from other States which are also undertaking trial challenge inspections. In many respects our experiences point in similar directions.

I hope the British paper will help provide a basis on which to build consensus on this key issue. The way will then be much clearer to resolve remaining issues.

I hope other member States too will carry this work forward as quickly as possible. If you doubt our findings, go and do the practical inspections for yourself and report back here to the Conference on Disarmament.

Finally, I would make an appeal for no more appeals. Too often we have heard that greater political commitment by parties concerned could bring these negotiations to speedy conclusion. Of course we want a convention, an effective convention, as soon as possible. But many of the remaining answers can only be found through research, investigation and trails not here, but in relevant facilities, both military and civil, in the territory of member States of the Conference on Disarmament.

This work should go ahead quickly. The clearest signal of political commitment to a chemical weapons convention that any State can give is to involve itself in this work back at home and to present concrete results here.

Verification is the key, and challenge inspection is the key to verification. Once we can resolve all the problems of challenge inspection, the long-sought goal of a verifiable chemical weapons convention will be in sight.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom for his important statement and for the kind words that he addressed to the Chair.

I should like now to ask whether any other delegation wishes to take the floor at this stage. I see none.

The secretariat has circulated today a timetable of meetings to be held next week by the Conference and its subsidiary bodies. The timetable has been

(The President)

prepared in consultation with the Chairmen of subsidiary bodies and as usual is merely indicative and subject to change, if necessary. If there is no objection, I shall take it that the Conference adopts the timetable.

It was so decided.

I have no other business for today and I intend now to adjourn this plenary meeting. The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will be held on Tuesday, 17 July, at 10 a.m.

The plenary meeting stands adjourned.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.